

FISH & WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: July 10, 2014

Agenda Item: Medicine Lodge Access Easement

Division: Wildlife

Action Needed: Final Action

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 10 minutes

Background

FWP proposes to purchase a 30-foot wide permanent road easement which would allow the public to cross 0.66 miles, in three separate road segments, of Denhan Ranches Inc. in Beaverhead County. The easement would be held by the federal Bureau of Land Management and would create access into Ayers Canyon in the Beaverhead Mountains and Kate Creek in the Tendoy Mountains. Both routes are primitive roads and they would receive minimal maintenance. The Kate Creek route is very steep and use will be limited by season. The cost of the easement is \$33,000 to be split among several partners including \$14,000 from FWP, \$14,500 from Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, \$2,000 from Beaverhead Outdoors Association and \$2,500 from Skyline Sportsmen.

Public Involvement Process & Results

The state and federal land management agencies in Dillon have been under intense pressure to find access solutions to public lands since Denhan Ranches pulled out of Block Management in 2012. An environmental assessment was submitted for public comment on May 9. Two written comments in support of the access easement were received.

Alternatives and Analysis

Two alternatives were presented in the EA. Under the No Action Alternative access would not be secured. Under the BLM Alternative, that agency would be encouraged to either build public land only routes or secure an easement through their realty process. Current BLM appraisal practices do not generate sufficient value to interest the landowner in selling an easement. Road construction is a viable alternative, but would require cut-and-fill on Ellis Peak on hills with grades as steep as 60 percent.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale

FWP recommends final approval by the Fish and Wildlife Commission to complete the acquisition of the access easement. The access will benefit the public by providing opportunities for upland bird hunting, big game hunting, wildlife viewing and other outdoor recreational pursuits in Douglas-fir and sagebrush grassland habitat of southwestern Montana.

Proposed Motion

I move for final approval of FWP's effort to acquire an access easement on the Denhan Ranches Inc., in cooperation with the BLM, RMEF, Beaverhead Outdoors Association and Skyline Sportsmen.